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ABSTRACT

Efforts were undertaken to develop a parental interview for determining parenting style of parents of children of all ages and children within several subcultural groups. The interview provided mothers with descriptions of common situations in the home and asked the mothers to choose specific responses representing the following parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. These styles, identified through a review of parenting literature, combined traditional definitions of these approaches to parenting with other research regarding distancing techniques and parenting styles. Mothers were also asked to describe a situation as similar to the situation presented as possible. Preliminary data gathered from interviews of 21 lower class mothers showed that the mothers were not stylistically consistent in the forced-choice portion of the interview (consistency meaning choice of the same style for 8 out of 12 responses). The most common style chosen by mothers in the forced-choice responses was authoritative. In the descriptive portion, mothers were also inconsistent; however, the most common style of response was authoritarian. No significant correlations were found between forced-choice and descriptive portions of the interview. (The interview questionnaire is included, along with references.) (Author/TE)

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Parenting Styles of Lower Class Minority Mothers

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RUNNING HEAD: Parenting Styles

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ABSTRACT: Results of initial efforts to develop a parental interview to be used in determining parenting style of parents of children all ages and children within a number of subcultural groups are presented. This parental interview provided mothers with descriptions of common situations that occur in the home and then asked the mothers to respond by choosing responses already determined by the interviewer to represent identified parenting styles (forced-choice response). Styles, as identified through a review of parenting literature, were Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Permissive. These styles combined traditional definitions of these approaches to parenting with other research such as that reported regarding distancing techniques and parenting styles. Additionally, mothers were asked to describe a situation as similar to the situation presented as possible (descriptive responses). Preliminary data gathered from interviews of 21 lower class mothers shows that the mothers were not consistent in the forced-choice portion of the interview (consistency being represented by identifying 8 of 12 responses in the same style). The most common style chosen by mothers in the forced-choice responses was authoritative. In responding to the descriptive portion of the interview, mothers were found no more consistent; however, the most common style of response was authoritarian. Correlational analyses showed no significant correlations between forced-choice and descriptive portions of the interview. The next step to be addressed by the authors is a study in which lower class and middle class mothers are interviewed with an interview revised to reflect a fourth parental style suggested by the analysis of the descriptive response.

In the present paper we will be presenting the results of our initial efforts to develop a parental interview that could be used by researchers to determine parenting style of parents of children of all ages and within a number of subcultural groups. In addition, we will be presenting preliminary data that was gathered from lower-class minority mothers using this instrument. The majority of these mothers were raising their children without a father in the household. We have found that this group has often been left out of parenting styles research.

For some years now researchers have been using a number of interview techniques to measure or characterize parental style. When we have read this material, we have come away with several conclusions. First, most of the techniques are quite complicated, requiring a good deal of interpretation on the part of the researcher. This in turn makes it necessary for the reader to trust the researcher's interpretation.

In addition, it is often difficult for the reader to replicate the researcher's study with the information presented in the reports. In fact, in some cases we have found it difficult to understand exactly what was done even after acquiring the descriptions of the scoring systems from the sources listed in the article. For instance, Baumrind (1967, 1971) required scorers to rate protocols from open-ended questions and the partial narrative reports of observers who had made home visits on 56, 5-point scales. These ratings were then submitted to a cluster analysis. The resulting clusters were then used to place parents or families into patterns. The difficulty that we had in understanding the basis for these patterns is mentioned later in the discussion.

More recently Grolnick and Ryan (1989) used a 1-hour, structured, open-ended interview that focused on ways in which the parents motivated their children and how they responded to the children's behaviors. Similar to Baumrind's work, two people (interviewer and observer) rated the parental responses after the interview, this time on eight 5-point

scales. Other researchers have no way of reviewing the protocols in order to determine on what the two raters were basing their decisions.

Our present approach is one in which parents were provided with situations and asked to respond by choosing responses already determined by the interview to represent identified parenting styles. In addition, parents were asked for a self-reported description of the behavior they exhibited the last time they were in a situation that was as similar as possible to the situation described by the interviewer. This latter response would provide a description of an actual behavior in an actual situation and would serve to determine whether or not the response they perceived as their most likely or most acceptable pattern of behavior was consistent with what they recalled as actually occurring in such a situation.

Once developed, the above interview would have a number of uses. First, it would help determine the degree with which parents perceive their behavior to be consistent across situations and children (if there were more than one child in the family).

Second, it would provide a reliable instrument which could be rather easily used for children of many different ages (from pre-school through grade school age). Additionally, it would then be possible to combine the results of this interview with observational studies and determine the relationship between perceived parental behaviors and actual behaviors as well as between perceived parental behaviors and children's behaviors in other environments (e.g., school).

METHODS

Instrument Initially, 12 situations were identified that were believed to be encountered by all parents. The twelve situations included the child (1) being good for a period of time, (2) getting ready to go to bed, (3) missing a school field trip due to illness, (4) getting the parent's help with an assigned project, (5) planning a birthday party, (6) getting an allowance, (7)

misbehaving at school or other out-of-home environment, (8) being disciplined at home, (9) breaking a lamp in the home due to to carelessness, (10) keeping his/her room clean, (11) not letting the parent know where he/she is and arriving home late, (12) staying up late at night to watch a special television program.

Responses were then generated that represented three competing parental styles (philosophies). The labels used for these styles were those originally used by Baumrind. However, our definitions were not exact replications of the styles that Baumrind proposed. They were consistent with the styles as we understood them; they were also representative of other research regarding parent-child interactions and child development. Thus, these styles represented three comprehensive approaches to raising children.

According to the styles outlined, parents exhibiting the permissive style leave the decision about what to do up to the child. They believe that the child must discover for him/herself what is the best decision. Unless the child's behavior interferes with the parent or threatens the child's or others' safety the child is free to choose any behavior.

Parents exhibiting the authoritarian parenting style basically believe that their role is to make decisions or teach the child proper behaviors without any interferences from the child. When there is conflict, they believe the parent is free to utilize rather harsh disciplinary behaviors to enforce their supremacy.

The authoritative parenting style is representative of the parent who believes that the child and the parent must cooperate in determining what are the best choices of action. From very early on this parent consults the child and makes no decisions without input from or consultation with the child.

After generating these responses for each question, two techniques were used to insure that the reponses did indeed represent the styles intended. First, all responses were given to

advanced graduate students who were asked to place them in consistent categories. This was done without providing the stems and resulted in 82% placement agreement between the sorted responses and the proposed parenting styles. Because none of the responses were consistently placed in the incorrect pile, they were kept in the same place as originally designated.

Second, 10 advanced graduate students were given descriptions of the styles and then asked to place the situation responses with the appropriate styles. Here the three responses for six of the situations were correctly placed with 93% or better agreement with the proposed styles. The responses for the remaining six situations were rewritten and given to 10 other advanced graduate students and 100% of the revised responses were correctly placed by proposed parent style. Once again, since there were no responses that were consistently categorized incorrectly, we kept the responses as representative of the same styles.

The interview then consisted of 12 situations, each with three corresponding responses representative of the three parenting styles. For each of these situations, the mothers had to indicate which of the three reponses they would most likely exhibit in that situation.

Next the mothers were asked to attempt to recall the last time they were in such a situation and recall exactly what they had done. Finally, we added the question, "What jobs would you be happy to see your child get as an adult?"

Subjects. The subjects for the interview were 21 minority mothers who were attending an educational center serving the under-educated poor. These women were attending classes in arithmetic, reading, and other basic skills. While they could study and then take a number of tests qualifying them for jobs (e.g., nurses aid qualifying exam, high school grduate equivalency, etc.), there were no official degrees offered at these centers. To attend these classes, it was necessary that the students be below the povery level. Thus, these were poor women who had not successfully completed regular public school and were attempting to acquire

additional training so that they could acquire some or better employment. They volunteered to take the interview on the invitation of the director of the center.

All except two women interviewed were living alone with their children and only two of the women were employed at the time of the interview. Thus, most of the women were on welfare. For the children below school age, mothers had arranged for some type of day care (e.g., Head Start, a day care center for poor families, extended family care, etc.). Welfare authorities were seemingly willing to provide daycare for those mothers who wanted to attend school.

Procedure. The director of the center contacted the mothers who were attending class during the summer term and requested that they take the interview in order to help a student with a research project. To our knowledge, all who were asked to participate agreed. Children who were the subject of the interview ranged in age from 1 to 14 years of age. Of these children, 12 were males and nine were females.

Each mother was interviewed individually by one or two students participating in the project. Responses were recorded on a cassette recorder. One of these interviewers was black and the other white. All mothers completed the interview and seemed to enjoy talking about their children. Only 17 of the 21 interviews were available for analysis due to recording errors during the interview process. Of these 17 interviews, 11 mothers discussed male children and 6 discussed female children.

RESULTS

All of the forced-choice responses were tallied and summed across parent and situation. We arbitrarily adopted the criterion by which a parent was classified as consistent if she classified 8 reponses in the same style. When this was done, two parents could be classified as authoritative and one as authoritarian.

Assignment of the others would be classified as mixed. Parents simply were not consistent in the way they responded across situations. In generaly, the most frequently used style was authoritative (47% authoritative, 32% authoritarian, 21% permissive). Thus, parents indicated that they would bring their child into the decision-making process nearly half of the time (10 of the parents had at least 6 authoritative responses and all had at least one).

Each free response description was independently classified by each of the authors. On those responses where there was disagreement, the authors after discussion arrived at a mutually agreed upon classification. Here 8% of the responses were authoritative, 64% of the responses were authoritarian, and 28% were permissive. Using the criterion of 8 responses in the same style representing a consistent response, 8 of the parents could be classified as authoritarian. Of interest is the obvious increase in authoritarian responses in comparison to forced-choice responses. One interpretation of this difference is that while parents believe in and understand the rationale behind including their child in decision making, when the situation arrives, it is much more difficult to act in the manner desired.

Next, we looked at the consistency across parents but within the situation that each style was exhibited. These data are in Figure 1. Here it is possible to see how the shift took place within each situation.

Insert Figure 1 here

Although it is always questionable to use correlations with this type of data, we believe that such correlations would provide some hypotheses that could be followed up in a more acceptable and rigorous methodological manner.

First, we computed correlations between responses in the forced-choice and the open-ended portions of the interview. None of these correlations reached significance. If we believed that the forced-choice responses represented what the parent felt was important and that the

open-ended responses represented what they actually did, we could suggest that belief and action were not related.

We also correlated each response type with age and sex of the child. In the age correlation using the forced-choice answers, we found that as age increased there was a tendency to choose more authoritative responses ($r = .45$, p .07). In addition, with the open-ended responses as age increased the number of authoritarian responses tended to decrease ($r = -.62$, p .01). Neither of the other correlations were significant but they were obviously in the positive direction. Thus, we could say that passive responses and the few authoritative responses were increasing with age. There are no significant relationships with sex of child.

Insert Table 1 here

The job expectancies for their children are included in Table 1. Here it can be seen that the expectancies are quite high. These mothers do not seem to have given up the "American Dream" for their children.

DISCUSSION

At first glance, one might find our results to be quite disappointing. Parents in this sample were not as consistent as was expected. On the other hand, when we looked again at other research, it appeared that we may have been too hasty in accepting the concept of a consistent parental style. For instance, when attempting to characterize parental styles of adolescents from the adolescents' responses to questionnaires, Dornbush, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Fraleigh (1987) found that they could classify less than 50% of the parents based on adolescent responses to 25 questions (8 for authoritarian, 8 for permissive, and 9 for authoritative). Parents were classified by the relative ranking of their child's answers to the questions in the eight clusters (e.g., if the child's reponses were in the upper third of the distribution on one set and not in the top third in the others, the parent was classified as "pure" for that style).

Grusec and Kuczynski (1980) used an approach quite similar to the approach employed here in attempting to describe parental disciplinary techniques. They provided parents with 12 situations and asked them to indicate which disciplinary techniques they would use. They found that "A mother's reported disciplining appeared, then, to be determined more by what the child did than by some consistent child-reading apporach on the mother's part" (p. 1).

Finanally, when we looked back at the operational definitions for each parental style used by Baumrind, we had the feeling that she may have been led more by theoretical bias than empirical finidngs. For instance, the definition of the Authoritarian (Not Rejecting) parental pattern was "(a) both parents have scores above the median in Firm Enforcement or one parent score in the top third of the distribution, (b) both parents have scores below the median in Encourages Independence and Individuality, or one parent has scores in the bottom third on Authoritarianism" (p. 22, 1971). Even with this rather arbitrary post hoc apprach, not all of the families could be classified. When we add the fact that the interrater reliabilities were not strong, we are not certain that these results could be replicated and even less certain that they represent sufficient evidence for the existence of parental styles.

Thus, the position that parents either have a consistent parenting philosophy or exhibit behaviors that could be construed as representing a consistent philosophy may have considerably less support than one would believe by reading a typical child development text. Instead, the situation or similar situations may be the importance antecedent to consistent behaviors. Clearly more research will have to be done on this problem.

The present researchers plan to proceed in three ways. First, we are going to refine our interview. After listening carefully to the free response section, we became convinced that there were two distinct authoritarian response types. In the first, the parent was in control but carefully explained the reason for the response. In the second, the parent left out the

explanation. Thus, we are reconstructing the forced-choice portion of the interview to add this response type. Also, we are going to use a response mode in which the parent ranks the various responses rather than choosing only one. In addition, we are constructing a manual to be used in classifying the free responses.

Second, we are going to use the revised interview with a new set of parents from both middle-class and lower-class backgrounds. This replication with both social classes will give us a better idea about the accuracy of the findings with the first sample. If the findings replicate, then we will begin looking for situations which seem to elicit similar repsonses. This will eventually lead to a new theoretical account of parenting.

Finally, we will begin correlating parental responses with child behaviors. In the past the approach has been to begin with child responses . Obviously, the link must be made at some level before we can begin to acquire a thorough understanding of the parenting process.

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INTERVIEW

SITUATION 1

Suppose that _____ has been very good all week and you decide he deserves a special treat. Of the three responses given you are most likely to

AT take him out to a place you both agree would be fun.

AN tell him you will make his favorite dessert if he keeps up the good work.

P give him some money to buy a treat and let him decide what to get.

SITUATION 2

You think children sleep better if they have a special activity just before bedtime that helps to signal the end of the day. Thus, at the end of each day, you would be most likely to

AT send him to his room, telling him to read quietly.

AN spend time with him talking about what happened that day and making plans for the coming day.

P let him decide what to do as long as it doesn't intrude on what anyone else is doing.

SITUATION 3

Suppose _____ was sick when his class went on a field trip and he was very upset about not getting to go. Of the responses given, you are most likely to

AT explain to him why he had to miss the tirp. Then, you would most likely decide with him what would be a similar activity that you and he or he and one of his friends could do.

AN tell him that there will be other trips and that missing a trip is all part of learning to deal with disappointments.

P tell him that there will be other trips. If he were still upset and asked you to take him you would do so.

SITUATION 4

Suppose _____ has been given a school project in which he has to acquire some information and give a report to the class. You are most likely to

AT have him explain how he is going to do the project, helping him remember how he did similar projects. You are most likely to offer to take him to the library, showing him how to use the materials if necessary. Also, you will probably oversee the project at home, helping him develop his ideas by offering suggestions while still letting him know that he must be the one to do the project in the end.

AN set aside some time when you can sit down with him after you have gathered some materials so that you can tell him how to best do the project. You are most likely to help him with each step to make sure that it is done well.

P help out somehow if he were real persistent.

SITUATION 5

It is _____'s birthday and _____ wants to have a group of his friends over for a party. Of the three responses given, you are most likely to

AT spend time with him letting him decide what he wants to have to eat and what he thinks his friends would like to play. You are most likely to offer suggestions if they are needed to ensure that he has everything he will need for the party and to help on the day of the party of he needs it.

AN plan to the party for him deciding what types of games the kids will play, what they will have to eat. You will most likely supervise the party activities.

P let him know you will provide food for him and his friends and let the kids do the rest. They know best what they like to do for fun.

SITUATION 6

You decide _____ should have a small amount of money of his own. Of the three responses given you are most likely to

AT discuss with him whether he would like to receiving an allowance and what ways he could earn the money.

AN provide him with a list of chores you want him to do to earn an allowance.

P give him a small sum of money on the same day each week.

SITUATION 7

_____'s teacher has written a note on _____'s report card saying that _____ has been disruptive in class, refusing to follow instructions. Of the three responses given you are most likely to

AT ask him what is going on in school. Then after discussing why it is impotant to follow instructions in school, you would decide with him what should be done about his not following rules this time, and what should be done if he doesn't follow the rules in the future. Also, you would contact the teacher for more information and tell the teacher that you have discussed the problem with him.

AN punish him and then tell him that you expect this type of business to stop immediately reminding him that he must behave like the other "good" kids, sitting and listening to the teacher and doing his work. Also, you would contact the teacher and tell her that you have taken care of the problem but that she should let you know if he misbehaves again.

P tell him that he has to work this out with the teacher at school but that he should follow the directions in the classroom.

SITUATION 8

Of these three responses regarding discipline in the home, you are most likely to

AT discuss the need for rules with him, discuss specific rules with him and mutually decide on what punishments might be appropriate when each rule is broken, taking care that the punishment somehow reflects correction of the rule that has been broken.

AN make the rules rigorous/uncompromising and the punishments strong enough when needed to help him learn right from wrong.

P believe that too many rules are harmful and that kids need to develop their own sense of right and wrong. Thus, you make few rules as long as he is not willingly destructive to things in the home, others in the family, or his own safety.

SITUATION 9

_____ has broken a lamp in the living room by being careless. Of the three responses given you are most likely to

AT discuss with him how it is important to be careful while in the house and then decide with him what needs to be done about the broken lamp. Once discussed and action decided upon, everything goes back to family business as usual.

AN punish him for breaking the lamp, probably spanking him, and then advising him that you are still disappointed and angry and that perhaps he should lay low until you have cooled down.

P have him explain how this happened and whether it could have been avoided although chances are you won't punish him.

SITUATION 10

_____ has his own room. You've asked him to keep his room clean and you find that the room is continually a complete mess. Of the three responses given you are most likely to

AT explain to him why it is important to keep his room clean and why it is important to follow through on responsibilities. You would then talk over with him what an appropriate consequence would be for not keeping his room clean in the future and what an appropriate consequence would be for not keeping his room clean on this occasion.

AN punish him for not doing what he has been told to do several times, or remind him in no uncertain terms that the terms that the room must be cleaned or you may have to resort to some sort of action he may not like. You make sure to tell him that you don't expect this to continue to happen.

P let him keep the room as he wants. You've told him why it should be clean, but a child's room is his only castle.

SITUATION 11

_____ is very late coming home from school. As it turns out, _____ had stopped to play at his friend's house. Of the three responses given, you are most likely to

AT explain to him how impotant it is for reasons such as safety and because you were worried about him, that he let you know where he is. Then mutually decide on a punishment for his actions on this occasion.

AN tell him that he must let you know where he is if he is not going to come straight home from school, or at any other time. Then you would punish him in a way that made clear to him how serious a matter this is.

P ask him where he had been. He knows that he has to be home for dinner, so you don't worry before then.

SITUATION 12

There is a special program on television tonight that _____ wants to see. However, the program ends 30 minutes after his bedtime and it is a school night. Of the three responses, you are most likely to

AT discuss with him that because this is a special occasion that he may stay up this one time,
but that on other nights he will have to go to bed at the regular time so that he isn't too sleepy for school.

AN enforce the bedtime schedule as set since it is a school night.

P let him stay up, his bedtime is pretty flexible anyway. Tomorrow, he will see whether he is so tired that it wasn't worth staying up.

AUTHORITATIVE (AT)

The authoritative parent believes that the best way to produce a successful adults is to not only be actively involved in the child raising, but to also have the child be actively involved in making decisions and learning about the world.

Even at a very early age, the child is to perceive that s/he is a partner and the parent will listen.

The authoritative parent also believes that in order for his/her child to reach his/her maximum cognitive potential, the parent must work with the child (e.g., read books with him/her, help him/her decide how to solve the problems at school and in the outside world).

The parent and the child search for the child's special abilities (e.g., musical talent), which will then be developed. In addition, the parent always provides logical reasons to the child for the decisions that s/he makes and the discipline s/he imposes. In addition, the parents believe that the children must serve their apprenticeship before assuming adult roles with responsibility to make decisions.

AUTHORITARIAN (AN)

The authoritarian parent believes that the best way to produce a successful adult is to provide the child with firm direction. Even at a very early age the child is to perceive that s/he should obey the parent without question.

Punishment may be harsh, but it is the duty of the authoritarian parent to ensure that a set standard of behavior is adopted.

The parent also believes that in order for his/her child to reach his/her maximum cognitive potential, the parent's and the school's role is to have the child behave and learn.

PERMISSIVE (P)

The permissive parent believes that the best way to produce a successful adult is to let the child fend for him/herself. Even at a very early age the child is to perceive that s/he may act in an independent manner. The permissive parent will leave the child alone if no one is hurt or bothered by the child's actions, but the permissive parent will assist the child if the child requests help.

Punishment is generally not used by the permissive parent, although on occasion the parent may punish the child for actions which the child generally receives little or no reprimand.

The permissive parent also believes that in order for his/her child to reach his/her maximum cognitive potential, the parent must allow the child to explore and develop without interference.

The permissive parent will make no special effort to discover or develop particular talents, but

will encourage those special talents that emerge.